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FOR FEDERAL  
STANDARD COBOL

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## Foreword

The Federal Information Processing Standards Publication Series of the National Bureau of Standards is the official publication relating to standards adopted and promulgated under the provisions of Public Law 89-306, and under Part 6 of Title 15 Code of Federal Regulations. The entire series constitutes the FEDERAL INFORMATION PROCESSING STANDARDS REGISTER.

The series is used to announce Federal Information Processing Standards, and to provide standards information of general interest and an index of relevant standards publications and specifications. Publications that announce adoption of standards provide the necessary policy, administrative, and guidance information for effective standards implementation and use. The technical specifications of the standard are usually attached to the publication, otherwise a reference source is cited.

Comments covering Federal Information Processing Standards and Publications are welcomed, and should be addressed to the Associate Director for ADP Standards, Institute for Computer Sciences and Technology, National Bureau of Standards, Washington, D.C. 20234. Such comments will be either considered by NBS or forwarded to the responsible activity as appropriate.

RICHARD W. ROBERTS, *Director*

## Abstract

This FIPS PUB defines the procedures that will be followed in requesting interpretations of the Federal Standard COBOL and in providing responses to those requests. The provisions of this document apply to all Federal departments and agencies and to vendors of COBOL compilers in their dealings with the Federal Government.

Key words: COBOL; compilers; data processing; Federal Information Processing Standard; information interchange; information processing; programming language; software.

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## INTERPRETATION PROCEDURES FOR FEDERAL STANDARD COBOL

Federal Information Processing Standards Publications are issued by the National Bureau of Standards pursuant to the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949 as amended, Public Law 89-306 (79 Stat. 1127), and as implemented by Executive Order 11717 (38 FR 12315, dated May 11, 1973), and Part 6 of Title 15 CFR (Code of Federal Regulations).

**1. Purpose.** The purpose of this Federal Information Processing Standards Publication (FIPS PUB) is to define the procedures that will be followed in requesting interpretation of the Federal Standard COBOL and in providing solutions to those requests.

**2. Background.** FIPS PUB 21 specifies Federal Standard COBOL. The Standard defines the elements of the COBOL Programming Language and the rules for their use. During the use of the standard, whether implementing compilers, validating compilers, or writing source programs, questions arise as to the meaning of certain language specifications. It is desirable to provide solutions to these questions that can be used uniformly throughout the Federal Government and by all implementors of compilers acquired by the Federal Government. In order to achieve this objective, a Federal COBOL Interpretations Committee was organized. The mission of this committee is to assist the National Bureau of Standards in examining and resolving any questions of interpretation for the Federal Standard COBOL. The members of this committee are selected on the basis of their knowledge and experience with COBOL and their outstanding technical and managerial abilities.

**3. Applicability.**

- a. The provisions of this document apply to all Federal departments and agencies and to vendors of COBOL compilers in their dealings with the Federal Government.
- b. Interpretations that are developed and approved as a result of employing these procedures apply to all COBOL compilers that are brought into the Federal inventory after the effective date that is specified with each interpretation.

**4. Cross Index.**

a. FIPS PUB 21, COBOL.

b. FPMR 101-32.1305-1.

**5. Approving Authority.** Department of Commerce, National Bureau of Standards (Institute for Computer Sciences and Technology).

**6. Maintenance Agency.** Department of Commerce, National Bureau of Standards (Institute for Computer Sciences and Technology).

**7. Implementation Schedule.** These procedures become effective upon date of publication of this FIPS PUB.

**8. Procedures.**

**a. Requesting An Interpretation.**

- (1) Requests may be submitted by a vendor of a compiler intended to conform to Federal Standard COBOL or by any department or agency of the Federal Government.
- (2) A request will contain the following information:
  - (a) Name of organization submitting the request.
  - (b) Name of individual within the submitting organization who may be contacted by the Federal COBOL Interpretation Committee (FCIC) concerning the request.
  - (c) Date by which interpretation is desired.
  - (d) Appropriate references to the Federal Standard COBOL specifications that have a bearing on the problem cited in the request.
  - (e) A concise explanation of the problem requiring an interpretation.
  - (f) Any supporting documentation that will assist in understanding and/or describing the problem.
  - (g) Any recommendations the requesting organization would like to make concerning a possible interpretation along with appropriate justification or comments.
- (3) Requests for interpretation will be sent to the Chairman of the FCIC. See paragraph 9 for address.



**b. Processing A Request for Interpretation.**

- (1) Upon receipt, all requests for interpretation will be distributed to all FCIC members. A meeting of the FCIC will normally be convened within two weeks of receipt of a request.
- (2) Position papers on proposed solutions to a cited problem may be submitted by any FCIC member for consideration by the FCIC membership.
- (3) The requestor of an interpretation will be invited to attend the meeting at which his request will be considered. The requestor will be encouraged to participate in the discussion of the problem identified by his request.
- (4) A recommended interpretation consisting of the information specified in paragraph 8.c.(2) below will be developed by the FCIC and submitted to the National Bureau of Standards.
- (5) Upon receipt of an FCIC recommended interpretation, the National Bureau of Standards will:
  - (a) Arrange for publication of the recommended interpretation in the *Federal Register* for the purpose of soliciting comments from Federal agencies, vendors, and private industry.
  - (b) Coordinate the recommended interpretation with Federal agencies through the FIPS Points of Contact.
  - (c) Coordinate, as deemed appropriate, the recommended interpretation with the American National Standards Institute Committee X3J4 and/or CODASYL Programming Languages Committee.
  - (d) Notify the requestor of the recommended interpretation.
- (6) Comments received as a result of publication and coordination of the recommended interpretation will be reviewed by the FCIC and a final recommended interpretation will be developed by the FCIC and submitted to the National Bureau of Standards for approval.

**c. Dissemination of an Approved Interpretation.**

- (1) The National Bureau of Standards will be responsible for the dissemination of approved Federal COBOL Interpretations Committee (FCIC) interpretations.
- (2) The approved FCIC interpretation will consist of the following information:
  - (a) Definition of the problem being resolved.
  - (b) Discussion of the issues relevant to the problem.
  - (c) Discussion of the solution to the problem (interpretation).
  - (d) Any necessary clarifications to the Federal Standard COBOL to effect the resolution.
  - (e) Effective date of the interpretation.
- (3) The approved FCIC interpretation will be disseminated in at least the following manner: publication in the *Federal Register*; letter to the FIPS Points of Contact; letter to the requestor; and, as appropriate, letter to American National Standards Institute Committee X3J4 and CODASYL Programming Languages Committee.
- (4) Each approved FCIC interpretation will be disseminated to the FIPS Points of Contact and the requestor as soon as possible. This normally is expected to be one week after approval. Dissemination through publication in the *Federal Register* will be accomplished as quickly as possible after approval of the interpretation.
- (5) The National Bureau of Standards will maintain a central register of approved interpretations for reference.

**9. Points of Contact.** The following addresses will be used:

- a. For correspondence directed to the Chairman of the Federal COBOL Interpretations Committee:

Chairman, Federal COBOL Interpretations Committee  
% Associate Director for ADP Standards  
Institute for Computer Sciences and Technology  
National Bureau of Standards  
Washington, D.C. 20234

- b. For correspondence directed to the National Bureau of Standards:

Associate Director for ADP Standards  
Institute for Computer Sciences and Technology  
National Bureau of Standards  
Washington, D.C. 20234